

**JOINT MEETING
BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE
AND
BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN**

November 30, 2004

7:00 PM

Mayor Baines called the meeting to order.

Mayor Baines called for the Pledge of Allegiance, this function being led by Alderman O'Neil.

A moment of silent prayer was observed.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Board of School Committee Members Stewart, Scott, Herbert, Labanaris, Gatsas, Donovan, Kelley, Gelinas, Kruse, Beaudry, Cote, Ouellette and Perry

Board of Aldermen Roy, Gatsas, Guinta, Sysyn, Porter, O'Neil, Lopez, Shea, DeVries, Garrity, Smith, Thibault and Forest

Absent: Board of School Committee Member O'Brien
Alderman Osborne

Messrs: R. Comstock

Mayor Baines advised that the purpose of the joint meeting is to hear a presentation from RMC and RKM Consulting regarding public perceptions of the Manchester school system that emerged in a survey sponsored by the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

Mayor Baines stated I'd like to welcome everybody to this joint meeting of the Board of Mayor and Aldermen and School Board. As I mentioned during the opening moment of silence that we had a Central High School graduate, Adam Brooks, who lost his life in Iraq and we've ordered flags across the City to be flown at half mast in his honor, and obviously we'll be vigilant about whatever funeral arrangements are made to ensure that the City is properly represented. But again our thoughts and prayers are with the family this evening and with all of the families across our nation that are grieving during this very difficult time.

Mayor Baines stated if I could just take a moment of personal privilege since today was the Red Sox day in Manchester. Those of you who had the opportunity to see the outpouring of pride in the Red Sox today in downtown Manchester, it was something that absolutely extraordinary. We had thousands and thousands of people lined up. When we brought the trophy from the Veteran's Hospital this morning, the line went from City Hall almost all of the down to Canal Street when the trophy arrived and it stayed that way right until approximately 1:30PM when we actually had to cut off the line to get everybody through get

the trophy over to the reception and I think there were between 4,000 and 5,000 people at Veteran's Park. A couple of highlights of the day, just so you understand how magnificent it was, I was approached by this letter, Gretchen Cott, on Elm Street and she said did anybody think about bringing the trophy to the Veteran's Hospital. At that time no one had, but I said now that you've mentioned it to me we'll what we can do and I called the Red Sox and arranged to bring the trophy, Governor Benson arranged for the trophy to be greeted at the border, brought to the VA Hospital this morning and we went through the VA Hospital today and it was just a magnificent display of affection. There was one Marine in a wheelchair with his baseball glove and said he had had that baseball glove with him right through World War II and is waiting for this day. So it just got better after that. It was a great day for the City. Hats off to the sports council that I helped organize several months ago and this was their first major task and it was magnificent and Verizon Wireless came through with a lot of the funding initially to help us support it and there were many other businesses that contributed today. But it was just a great event for the City. The Red Sox said it was the biggest celebration outside of Boston that they had had and really commended everyone involved for the organization. Police, Fire, all safety officials, Highway officials, everybody coordinated and it was just a great day for the City. We should be very proud that we are citizens of Manchester.

Mayor Baines stated we're together this evening for a very important activity. I'd like to introduce Robin Comstock, who will explain the process and then the presenter this evening.

Robin Comstock, President, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, stated let me just set the table for you and then introduce you to the two people that can really give you the information that we're here to share with you today. The Chamber's Community Education Collaboration Project is a result of a collaborative effort between the business community and the School District. This project represents the most significant study every conducted to determine the public and business communities perception of public education in Manchester and it was launched with the understanding that the Manchester School District will address problems uncovered by the study. The results of the study are meant to provide the community with an objective view of the school system. It will assist the Manchester School Board and administrators in arriving at the best practices to address any identified shortcomings. In addition, it will establish a benchmark against which further progress can be measured. The Chamber's Education Committee interviewed multiple firms before selecting RMC Research, a business with extensive experience in educational research from coast to coast. RMC Research later subcontracted with RKM Research and Communications to undertake the telephone survey portion of our study. And now to present the results of this survey, I would like to welcome Carol Keirstead. Carol has been a senior research associate with RMC Research since 1994 and has had extensive experience working in diverse fields of education prior to that time. Presenting with Carol will be Aaron Reid, partner and director of marketing research for RKM Research and Communications, and Carol if I may, just before you begin, I would like you all to know that one of the factors and

reasons why we chose RMC is that they have extensive experience in mill revitalization in mill communities and historic communities all up and down the northeast coast that have many similarities to Manchester. And before I turn the microphone over I'd like everyone to know that we will be taking this study on Thursday night, December 2nd at 6:30PM at McLaughlin Middle School, the pink flyer you can grab on your way out and we will be developing strategies and actions steps and solutions to issues that were raised by this study. So the first part of our beginning really will occur on Thursday night as we begin to solve some of the problems that were raised through the process of this study.

Mayor Baines stated and people listening at home, people are invited to attend, at 6:30PM at the McLaughlin Middle School, December 2nd.

Ms. Comstock continued I'd also like everyone to know that we do have the full report at the Chamber of Commerce, it's approximately 120 pages, at this point we're really making it available with the executive summary, it's a quick, easy read of about seven or eight pages. That 120-page study is on a compact disk in the back of the room and when you leave you can grab one of those. So with that Carol I want you to know it was a great pleasure to meet and work with you and the members of RMC and we just are thrilled to have a partnership and I'll turn it over.

Carol Keirstead, RMC Research Corporation, stated first I'd like to say how much I appreciate the Chamber's work to engage itself in a matter of public participation. We work across the country with public school districts, with state education agencies and with the Federal government in efforts to try to improve public education and most of our work actually is in urban environments. And I'd just like to say before we share the results of the report, how unique and important I think this initiative is. Unique in that it is an attempt initiated by the business community to bridge the gap between public perceptions of it's public schools and the reality of public education in the city, because I think we all recognize that without clear and solid factual information, perceptions make all the difference in the world and the Chamber realized much to it's credit that how people view public schools in Manchester will help determine the viability of the city as it goes forward. So I'd just like to say how much we have appreciated working with such a smart community and we think you're doing really unique work.

Ms. Keirstead continued what I'd like to do is first tell you a little bit about the purpose of the study and I will describe the elements of the study that we took on and then we will go through a summary of the results of the study. And as Robin said, everybody has access to the full report on the compact disks that are available in the back of the room. The purpose of the study was to understand the nature of public perceptions of the Manchester public schools. We were asked by the Chamber to come in and present a proposal that would meet their criteria for a study that would look and examine public perceptions and we had the opportunity over about three different occasions to present a proposal to the Chamber, to

engage in dialogue about the extent to which it would meet the purpose, and to really engage in a dialogue about what would best meet the purposes of the community and also meet the standards of rigor for research. So it was really a dual mutual process. One of the expectations that the Chamber gave to us in the research study is that they wanted to be able to establish a baseline against which they could track progress over time. They were committed to the fact that this undertaking was going to make a difference in Manchester. They told us very clearly they didn't want another report that was going to sit on a shelf and that's something that we also were very interested in not doing. I think far too often we do do that and that's something we didn't want to do. So we were committed to engaging in a process that would build a solid baseline of data from which the Manchester community could track progress over time. The other aspect, which is really important in this process, is that we wanted to early on begin a dialogue with residents across the community and met with the Chamber's education subcommittee to get a sense of who are the key opinion holders in the community, who is it that we really need to start engaging with. So we came up with a study that was able to touch I think a range of stakeholders in the community, and the other thing we wanted to make sure that we built into this process was an ongoing way to engage the community, hence a public forum, which will be happening on Thursday night. The design that we ended up proposing and implementing is a mixed method design to meet the overall purposes of the study. We decided to embark on what we call a qualitative study as Phase I, which would be to interview persons across the community to begin a dialogue about what their perceptions of Manchester public schools was, how they came to form those perceptions. We talked to a total of about 120 participants, we talked to folks within the school department, key leaders, we talked to teachers across levels of the system, we talked to students in the system, we talked to residents in the community with and without children in the schools, we talked to folks across different socioeconomic ranges, we talked to business leaders, we talked to recent graduates, we talked to a couple of high school drop outs. So we felt like even in a pretty small study we were able to talk to a good range of stakeholders. And in the qualitative study we conducted what we call content analysis, which is a scientific method for analyzing narrative data. We had tomes of interview data to go through, so we used a scientific program to analyze all of that. And then we embarked on what we call Phase II of the study and that is where we subcontracted with RKM Research to conduct a scientific telephone survey with residents across the city. They sampled 300 residents in the city and 100 business members and when Aaron does his presentation we'll talk in more detail about those two. So what I'd like to do is just share with you at this point what we learned as a result of this study in Phase I.

Ms. Keirstead stated one of the key things that came out of the analysis of all of the narrative data was that people talk over and over again about Manchester needing significant change. People talk about Manchester's history quite a bit, it's roots, it's a mill town, the fact that it has residents who continue to stay here, raise children, raise grandchildren, so there was a lot of reminiscing about Manchester. At the same time there was a lot of talk of Manchester's new mix of ethnic groups in the city. I think every person that we talked to alluded to the

fact that Manchester's diversity is something that is noteworthy, is something to be proud of, and was something that helped Manchester sort of stand out as a New Hampshire community. One of other features of this discussion about a community in change was a sense that a lot of folks in Manchester feel that it's a very stable community, again, with people that raise families, continue to stay here, and are very committed to the community. And also for a concern for not losing the good talents that come through the Manchester public schools; wanting to make sure that people that graduate from Manchester schools come back, stay here, choose to raise their families here, and there was some concern that in fact maybe we're losing some talent by them choosing to leave. Again, a lot of residents talked about the mill town roots in Manchester. In some regard people talk about kind of a mill town mentality is a barrier, at the same time we want to emphasis the fact that people really see Manchester's mill town as real strength, a source of identity. Similarly, particularly about the schools, people talked about sort of the passing of generation of teachers. You'll see further on in the study some people feel very strongly about the quality of teachers in the system, are worried about the future in a way. One of the other themes that we come up with in this study is what we call hallmarks of quality and these are the elements about the public schools that people really view as strengths of the system and really holdup as hallmarks of quality to be shared with others, to celebrate, to recognize, and to really build on. One of the most striking strengths that came out through the interviews were that people feel very hopeful about the current leadership in the school system and this really goes from the superintendent to changes at the school level, to the Mayor holding a prominent role in advocating for education in the City, to changes that the School Committee level. People really feel very hopeful about changes that have happened in the last couple of years. A clear strength of the Manchester public schools, according to residents here, is the quality of the staff. People view teachers in Manchester as highly dedicated and very committed to the success of students. A lot of people, not surprisingly, talk about the facilities are not a strength and is something that needs attention, but over and over again we heard the buildings aren't what make it, it's public school teachers that make Manchester schools. Another hallmark of quality in the schools is clearly is clearly the school systems K-12 fine and performing arts program. People spoke about this program as being outstanding, extraordinary, amazing what it does for kids, and clearly across everybody that we spoke to they think this program is just something to be proud of. They're proud that the system hasn't lost the arts emphasis, because of budget situations and so forth, people really value the fact that the Committee and the City has held them to that. There were other particular programs that people mentioned when we just asked them to tell us what they felt good about in the Manchester public schools and a lot of different programs were talked about. The robotics program is clearly seen as something unique and outstanding. It offers kids opportunities that they probably wouldn't get elsewhere. Sports came out again and again as a strength in the city and something that holds a lot of pride and meaning in the community. Preschool opportunities, alternative education, particularly for dropouts. Manchester School of Technology is seen as a very viable program. Adult education, extracurricular offerings, and students particularly spoke about programs that help and their peers deal with social

problems. They said that the school's efforts to help students deal with bullying, harassment, drugs, alcohol, were really seen as vital to their experience. And lastly one of the hallmarks of quality that came out over and over again, from folks that had kids in the system and folks that didn't, was the fact that Manchester offers kids a real world education. Parents who may have had misgivings about sending their kids to the Manchester public schools and ended up doing so, talked about this as something that they couldn't have gotten elsewhere and that their kids having moved on really benefited by having to live in such a microcosm of society. The next series findings we sort of term as what matters. These are the things that came out of interviews and focus groups as holding significant meaning to the people of Manchester. One is a high quality education for all kids, and that's talked about in detail later on in the study. A viable Manchester public school community, parent involvement and community support. And when we talk about high quality education for all kids, people talked about the extent to which the school system was able to serve all children equally well and so when people talked about either their children having certain kinds of experiences in Manchester, often it was about what their kids were to a degree to which the system was able to provide a high quality education for them. Across the board people feel like the Manchester public schools serve college bound students well. That if kids are headed toward college, and that's their direction in life, the Manchester public schools a wealth of support and opportunity for kids to get into very high quality schools. Participants also voiced concern about a fear of students falling through the cracks. Some parents chose not to send their kids to Manchester public schools for this reason. A fear that would just be one among many, that they would get lost in the crowd, that nobody would be there for their students. A lot of concern for the average student. There was a lot of talk about college bound students being offered a well rounded education, some perceptions that special ed and students with English as a second language, sort of draining the system, what about my kid. There were divergent views about how well special education students are served. Again, some see the system overburden by its service to students of special education, while others describe both successes and barriers faced by special education students. We did talk to parents who had special ed kids in the system and they were very grateful in a way for the services provided to them and in some cases felt very good about the services. Others who didn't have kids in the system had this perception that these students are draining the system. So there were very divergent views. The degree to which the schools are serving the ethnic and linguistic student population, again, is viewed very differently across the community, and I would say the most striking difference occurred between minority and non-minority participants. People in the schools talked over and over about service to minority students and how well that is going. People who were not minority folks in the community felt similarly. At the same time when we actually talked to the folks in the minority group, they didn't feel as well cared for, they didn't feel as well connected to the system as people might think. Perhaps not surprisingly the City's drop out rate was raised as a concern across a section of stakeholders. People also talked about they don't really know what the real drop out rate is, but we just know it's high, so there was a lot of concern about this while people didn't feel like they had a solid grasp on what the real situation was. And I would say that in interviews with school leaders

themselves this was an area that they also raised as a concern as something to be addressing. Parents and school leaders want more equity and resources to reflect differences by neighborhood schools. One of things that people talked about was there is not value in neighborhood schools. At the same time they recognized that in an urban environment, because of students moving around, there needs to be equity across the system ensuring the kids have access to the same programs no matter where they go to school. When we talked about a viable Manchester public school community one of the things that came out over and over again, talking to students who went through the system, parents who had kids in the system, and students who went on from here, was the high value placed on connections developed between students and teachers. People felt like the connections between students and teachers was the single most thing that made a difference for them. Forget the buildings, forget everything else, it was that connection made between a teacher and student that made all of the difference in the world. Overall participants view the school climate as supportive despite the facilities and inadequacies. There was some differences when people talked about the climate at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Elementary being described as very nurturing, family friendly, middle school described as sometimes overly concerned with discipline, not as inviting for parents and the high schools each were described very differently. Central High School has it's own character and people really appreciated the different climates that each of the high schools had to offer. Parent involvement is regarded as extremely important across the board, yet is viewed inconsistently across school and economic levels. We were able to talk to folks across a wide socioeconomic range and we talked with people at the elementary, middle and high school levels and clearly people feel like at the elementary level parent involvement is supported, is strong. There was still some inconsistencies for people who are from low-income backgrounds. They feel less connected to the school, they feel somewhat intimidated, and parents who have kids with special education needs also felt a little bit more disconnected across the board. And not surprisingly parents of middle school students and high school students felt like they were less involved at those levels. Parents also expressed a sense of disconnection from discussions of policy and matters that they deem important to their children's success. A couple of things came up that parents expressed a lot of frustration around; the idea of a retention policy when parents feel like they should have voice in what happens to their students from grade to grade. They felt like they were met with a barrier of a resistant policy. That's one of them. Staff, parents and students expressed frustration about what they view as a lack of understanding and support from city leaders, the media and the broader community. People in general feel like the schools don't get a fair shake by people that hold important positions in the city. They don't feel like the perceptions are necessarily reflective of reality and they would like to see a different kind of dialogue about the public school happening. It's a general sense across the board that we heard. Participants placed a high value on education and the importance of all stakeholders having student success. Across the board people feel like the agencies in the city who are working with students and families should be better connected to the system. They feel the business community definitely has a place, I'm not sure what the place should be, people

were very unclear about whether or not there was sort of a coherent plan for community involvement in the schools. They gave specific examples of some business partnerships, but they didn't have a sense that there was really a coherent form for community involvement and support for education. By in large people described the middle schools as kind of the weak link in the Manchester Pre K-12 system. Parents we spoke with and middle school staff we spoke with spoke of the struggles happening at the middle schools, an overemphasis on discipline. Some spoke about their perception of a lack of rigor at the middle school level where kids go from elementary school having a pretty good sense of preparation, going to the middle school, not having the same level of support and rigor, and then hitting a wall when they hit high school, because high school is perceived to be rigorous and challenging. Participants recognized the value of promoting the school's image and voiced criticism of local media and city officials for negative betrayals of the city's public education system. A lot of people just came out with they care more about taxes than public education, people just really expressed a sense of frustration in terms of a dialogue in education. Existing internal and external communication networks in place for sharing and accessing information are inadequate and could be in default of the assumptions about this. Clearly what we learned in talking to people is that the way they get information about the schools is by word of mouth. Friends talking to friends, parents talking to parents, and there wasn't a real sense that folks had access to information that was based on facts. We interviewed a group of realtors and human resource personnel and they said they don't have access to information to pass onto people. So they feel a lack of information to give to people. Viable Manchester public school community. Another challenge and barrier, not surprisingly, is that people recognize that students that attend Manchester public schools come from difficult conditions. People recognize that a lot of students are living in conditions of poverty, homelessness and transients. Families are dealing with health and mental health issues, cultural differences and there was a lot of talk about race in classes and I think the most important thing in this is that people feel strongly that there's a lot of resources in Manchester but it's just not well-coordinated at this time. Funding, facilities and material resources in the Manchester schools are characterized as very poor. People feel that while there has been efforts made in recent history to address facilities they still characterize them as less than up to par. At the same time, there's a lot of pride communicated to people and being able to do it against all odds. They talk about stories with kids with mittens on taking tests and they feel a sense of pride in a funny way about managing that environment. Across the board the people feel like the schools are under funded, clearly. Again, they feel like Manchester is kind of doing it against all odds. Participants expressed great concern about the system's ability to attract and retain high quality teachers given the relatively low salary structure and work demands. Again, this is related to people's description of losing our veteran teachers...how are we going to attract another cadre of teachers and again this is people's perception not entirely grounded in factual information. One of the strongest, clearest patterns that came through all of the data is there are conflict in perception and that's really what this whole study was intended to do to identify differences in perception and where they come from so that something can be done about them and we found that there were clear differences in

perception across what we call people who are insiders and people who are outsiders. So, if you're a teacher inside the system you talk about your job as challenging, rewarding, you wouldn't work anywhere else. People love their jobs. If you're a teacher working in another community and you're thinking about going to Manchester you're likely to hear "why would you do that". So, again, there are differences whether you are inside the system or outside the system. Again, that's similar to the divide that happens between minorities. If you're not a member of an ethnic minority community you tend to think Manchester is embracing all of its ethnics, is doing a wonderful job and doing all it can. At the same time if you are a member of an ethnic community you don't necessarily feel it's welcomed. I am going to introduce this section of the report briefly and I would encourage you to read in fuller detail later but I wanted a chance to go through the quantitative data. One of the elements of this study that we took on was an effort to really come to understand what the Manchester public schools really meant to people and one of the strategies for doing that in social research and marketing research is the use of photos and images to illicit people's deep thinking about matters such as public education. So, we engaged in a process called photo elicitation as a means to enable people to identify images that reflect their thoughts and feelings of the Manchester public schools and we took them through a particular protocol that asks them to speak to their particular...and then they actually create a summary of images to represent their experience with the Manchester schools. This is a collage from a gentleman who graduated from Manchester not that long ago, moved out of the community, started his own business and moved back to the community and clearly what the Manchester schools represented to him one of the metaphors through his experience was the notion of a journey hence the runner in the center. He also described the importance of connectiveness that he felt with teachers and peers in the school system and he described his experience in Manchester...you can't really see them but he keeps falling off a vehicle and getting back on...it's a process of falling off, getting back on to redirect yourself. But, his whole experience in Manchester was positive and again he felt like it's the connection between staff and students that makes the difference in the world. This last one that I will present to you was done by someone who dropped out of high school and received a diploma from the Adult Ed Program and to this person the Manchester public schools...well, it may not look great on the outside just like Mother Teresa, they provide the foundation...everything this person really reflected a sense of appreciation for Manchester public schools. Several more images that you can look at...before I turn it over to Aaron I'd just like to add one more thing about the qualitative process that we used and that is that there's an abundance of will in this community among everybody that we talked about to make Manchester the kind of place they want to stay and raise their families here, they want to have their kids in the public school system and they want to be part of the process of making the schools better. It really was striking that people were grateful for having the opportunity to speak with us and really excited about the possibility. Now, I'll turn it over to Aaron who will go over the telephone survey results.

Mr. Reid stated first off I wanted to thank Robin and the Manchester Chamber, it's been a pleasure, all of our interactions with the Chamber have been phenomenal, just a great organization and we really enjoyed working with you on this project. Thank you all for having us here tonight. I'd also like to say how excited we were when RMC came to us to engage us on this project for a couple of reasons. First of all, we've worked with RMC in the past and we knew about the high quality of their work and so we knew this was going to be a high quality project and we were excited to be part of it and, second, we were really excited about being able to bring our statistical capability and our advanced analytical capability to such an important project and see the results of one of our studies really have the potential to make an impact on a community. So, we were very grateful and excited to be part of this project. Let me first start by introducing you to the quantitative design, what we actually did in the study. Carol mentioned this...we did two sets of population interviews. We did 315 general population interviews within the Manchester community and that was a random sample of Manchester residents. We actually over sampled within the population who have children in school because we wanted to be able to make comparisons between the population of individuals who have children in school versus those who don't have children in school and see if we could discern any differences in perceptions on the Manchester public school system across those populations. So, over sampling gives us a level of statistical precision to be able to compare those populations validly. We also conducted 100 interviews with local businesses in the Manchester area and who we were talking to at the businesses were individuals who were most responsible for hirings, so these were individuals who were most likely to see a resume with a Manchester public school student's education on it and evaluate those graduates as potential employees. In some cases that was the CEO, in some cases that was the head of human resources and so on. I'll give you a brief rundown of some of the demographics...you can see that the general population we covered in terms of household income, a range of individual households ranging from under \$25,000 a year to over \$100,000 in total household income. We also had a range of education within the household...those that had completed high school or less (27%), those who had completed 4 years of college or more (42%), we also sampled a variety of businesses ranging in size in terms of employees from under 10 to over 50...this presentation is largely data and I'm going to give a narrative as I go through it but you'll see on many slides to graphs and in some cases we're comparing the general population data to the business population data to see if there are differences in perceptions. To orient to these slides on the top you're first going to see the question that we asked of individuals in the telephone surveys. So, in this example, we asked right up front "what local issues in Manchester are most important to you?" Another thing on this slide you'll notice is that this among all respondents and this is their first response. So, this is an open-ended question off the top of your mind what local issues in Manchester are most important to you. You can see that 37% of the general population state that education is the local issue that is most important to you and it is the first issue that they mention. Education also ranks highly among businesses in terms of their first response, it's not first but it is among the top three with 18% mentioning education and the economy and property taxes also being issues that

are frequently being mentioned first by businesses. If you look at this slide you'll see the difference here is that this is a total mention slide. What that means is it's the same question we asked on the first slide but we allow people to give multiple responses. So, they may mention education first...how many people mention education in total...well, clearly education is the number one mentioned issue in the general population with 46% of the general population stating that it's one of the most important issues to them. The pattern is similar on the business side with 24% of businesses stating that education was an important issue to the Manchester community. This breakdown shows a general population comparing those who have children in school versus those who don't have children in school. This is again the answer to the first response to the question "what local issues in Manchester are most important to you?" Fifty-nine percent of individuals who have children in school state that education is one of the most important issues to them in Manchester. Those who do not have children in school don't mention it quite as frequently but you can still see that education is the number one issue mentioned first by those who don't have children in school. The total mentioned slide shows you the same pattern...68%, over two-thirds of the general population who have children in school mention education as a local issue in Manchester that's most important to them. Education is still the number one issue cited by those who don't have children in school. Another way to get at this and we asked a different sort of question is "how important is a high quality public school system?" and this slide compares the general population, again, to the business population and you can see that it's a little bit fuzzy but you can see that this slide here shows that 59% of the general population say that a high quality public school system is extremely important, 35% say that it's very important. So, you have over 90% of the general population stating that a high quality public school system is either very or extremely important. The pattern is the same in the business community. The business community 59% says that high quality public school system is extremely important and 34% say that it is very important. Practically no one in either population is saying that a high quality public school system is not that important. If we do the comparison between those that have children in school and those that don't have children in school you can see that those that have children in schools 70% say their high quality public school system is extremely important. Now, that's higher than those that don't have children in school but 50% of those who don't have children in school are saying that a high quality public school system is extremely important and almost 90% say that it is either very or extremely important. We asked next what level of priority should be given to improving the Manchester public schools and this comparison is between the general population and the business community. The pattern between these two populations is the same. About 60% of the general population say that improving the Manchester public schools should be given a very high priority. A greater percentage of businesses say that improving the Manchester public schools should be given a very high priority...62% of businesses say that it should be given a high priority. Only 1% of businesses said that it should be given a moderately low priority. This compares perceptions between those who have children in school versus those who don't have children in school. You can see that the pattern in the data here is very similar...those who have children in school 72% or nearly three quarters suggest that it

should be a very high priority and over half of those that don't have children in school also suggest that improving Manchester public schools should be given a very high priority. We asked the general population and businesses if they had any children enrolled in private school. You can see that this is just a descriptive slide that tells us that 3% of the general population has children enrolled in a private school and 6% of those we talked to at the businesses have children in private school. We asked what private schools your children are enrolled in and among those 3% and the general population you can see that it is relatively well spread between private elementary, middle and high and parochial elementary, middle and high. In the businesses you see those who we sampled, the majority who have children in private school have children in private high school. This slide is particularly interesting...we asked as a follow-up question why did you choose a private education for your child or your children...and you can see the different categories here. Among the general population 27% said they wanted a religious education whereas 46% said they want a higher quality education and 35% said they were not satisfied with MPS. Among those in the businesses that we talked to 67% said they chose a private education for their child or children because they wanted a higher quality education. To get a sense of what the overall impression in the Manchester community is of the Manchester public schools we asked a couple of different questions. The first one was what is your overall impression from very positive to very negative and you can see this slide is encouraging in the sense that 65% of the general population has either a somewhat or a very positive impression of the Manchester public schools where 24% are neutral and very few have a negative view of the Manchester public schools, however, the slide does suggest that there is room for improvement here in terms of perceptions...overall impression of Manchester public schools. We have 14% of the general population that does have somewhat of a very negative view of the schools. So, overall positive but room for improvement and that pattern is similar among businesses. We have almost 50% of businesses that have a positive view of the Manchester public schools and about a quarter that are neutral and about 20% that are negative. You'll see on these slides that I've denoted things that may be of concern in red and then it will become clear as we continue to go on. If we compare the pattern between those that have children in school and those who don't you see similar patterns in the data. Those who have children in school are a little bit more positive than their overall impression of the Manchester public schools versus those who don't, but overall more than 50% of each population has a positive view of the Manchester public schools. Again, there's room for improvement here. Another way to get at impressions of the schools is to ask questions on the direction of the schools as in how do you feel the school, where do you feel the school is headed in the right direction or the wrong direction and this data again compares the general population to the business community. This data is encouraging...similar to what Carol reported there is a perception that the schools are headed in the right direction. Forty-five percent and 20%...65% of the general population feel that the schools are headed in the right direction. Either somewhat or strongly in the right direction and that pattern is the same among businesses. There are a few people that feel that it is not headed in the right direction or its headed in the wrong direction and that shows some room for improvement. If we compare the data between those who

have children in school versus those who don't the perceptions are the same. Those who have children in school and those that don't have children in school do believe that the schools are generally headed in the right direction. You can see the large amount of red in this slide...the question is "are Manchester schools over funded, under funded or funded at the right level?" Almost two-thirds of the general population feels that the Manchester public schools are under funded. This is consistent with what was found in the qualitative data, perhaps not surprising to you. Sixty-two percent of businesses say that the schools are under funded and you can see that a very small proportion of each population feels that the schools are under funded (7% and 3%). Clearly, there's a perception that there's not enough funding for the Manchester public schools. That pattern is the same if you look at those who have children in school versus those who don't have children in school with those who have children in school feeling a little more strongly that the schools are under funded (73%) that's three quarters of individuals who have children in school feel that schools are under funded. I'm going to go through a series of slides that look like this and I want to give you a brief description of how they're laid out. We asked respondents to rate the schools on several criteria. In this case we asked them to rate Manchester public schools in terms of their preparation of students for employment, for citizenship and for college and we asked them to grade the Manchester public schools on a scale from an A+ to an F. Now, we used that grading scale for a couple of reasons. First of all, it has desirable statistical properties for modeling and that may not mean a lot to a lot of people in the room but one thing that it does mean is that it's normally distributed data such that an A+ on this scale is truly an exceptional score. It's very hard to get an A+ and it's also very hard to get an F on this scale, so we have a nice distribution in the data and what you'll see is that our scores fall about in the middle of the scale which is what we want. So an A+ is something to strive for. Secondly, the reason we chose this scale is that while you're evaluating schools and education and it's an appropriate scale for evaluating schools, people could relate to it and they enjoyed using this scale. So, if you look at the comparisons...more red means more alarming or lower grades and what I've done is calculated a GPA (grade point average) for the schools on each of these categories and you can see that Manchester public schools and the general population in terms of preparing students for employment have an average GPA of about a 2.4 which is between a C+ and a B-...that's in the middle of this scale, it's about an average score and there's room for improvement there, but it's not bad. In terms of preparing students for citizenship they get a 2.6 and in terms of preparing students for college a 2.6...again, a little bit higher and consistent with the data from the qualitative research that suggested that the Manchester public schools are particularly good at preparing students for colleges. If you look at the perceptions among businesses the perception of preparing students for college the ratings are even higher. Businesses grade Manchester public schools with a 2.8 on average or a B-. This data is very rich and I would encourage everyone to look at the full report if you get a chance to be able to drill down to this data more deeply. What I've done in this presentation is include a few slides that allow us to look at differences in perception and across different demographic characteristics. So, this slide can basically be interpreted in a couple of ways. You can see that this is the same data on preparation for

college, employment and citizenship and if you look at the colored bars you can see how they rate relative to one another. If you look within these categories you can see differences across different demographic characteristics. So, this one in the middle, for example, is income. Those who have a total household income of under \$25,000, between \$25,000 and \$49,000, \$50,000 and \$74,000, \$75,000 and \$99,000, and over \$100,000...you'll see this U-shaped pattern in a lot of our data and those who are earning a total household income between \$50,000 and \$74,000 generally have a lower perception of the Manchester public schools across multiple categories. You see it here but you'll also see it recurring in some other slides and you'll also see that the pattern increases as college education in the household increases; that's also a relatively consistent pattern throughout the data. This slide asked the general population to evaluate the elementary, middle and high schools and you can see that the elementary schools get the highest grades, a B- in the general population with a 2.8. So, the middle schools are rated the lowest at 2.5 and again that's consistent with the qualitative data. Breaking down those evaluations by different demographic characteristics you can see the slight trend upward in college education and you can see that high schools are rated particularly low by those who are earning between \$50,000 and \$74,000 as a total household income. This slide evaluates the providers of education in Manchester public schools and we asked the general population and businesses to rate the teachers, the administrators, the Superintendent, the School Board and the Mayor...you can see that teachers get a very high rating among the general population, they get a solid B a 3.0...that's one of the highest grades throughout the entire survey. This again is consistent with Carol's data on how teachers are really valued within the school system.

Administration, the Superintendent and the School Board get rated a little bit lower 2.6, 2.5 and 2.4 and the Mayor comes in with the general population at 2.5...this is about an average grade. The pattern in the data is similar in the business community, if you look at teachers they're again rated high but note that the Mayor is rated quite high among the business community with a B-, a 2.8, this is in terms of facilitating a high quality education for Manchester public school students. In terms of evaluating the services we had them rate academic quality, the curriculum emphasis, the student to teacher ratio, the quality of the buildings and the facilities, the arts and music programs and the sports programs. You'll note that the academic quality gets about a B- which is good with some room for improvement. The sports programs and the arts programs get high grades as well (2.6 and 3.0). Note that the student to teacher ratio is a C (2.1) and that data is consistent in the business community's perception, actually below a C, a 1.9 in terms of the ratio of students to teachers. The quality of the building and the facilities also gets low grades in perception among the Manchester community. Here again if we break down that data you can see that this light colored blue line is the student to teacher ratio, rated lower across the board. The pattern is consistent across quality of buildings and facilities, arts and music programs and sports programs. We next asked respondents to evaluate how Manchester public schools serve the needs of the average students, accelerated students, students with learning needs and minority students. Within the general population the Manchester public schools meet the needs of average students with a rating of 2.6 about a B-, accelerated students at 2.5 and

students with learning needs at 2.5. Minority students overall the perceptions are at about a 2.7 or a B- level. The ratings in the business community are a little bit lower but the pattern in the data is the same. What we'll note here is that there are interesting differences across income categories. In terms of the demographics Carol talked about this insider versus outsider view and I think you may see some of that if you drill down into the data in terms of the demographics. If you look at the pattern for the minority students in terms of serving the needs for minority students what you will see is that income increases perception that the schools are meeting the needs of minority students also increases. These are significant differences for those who are earning \$100,000 or more as a total household income per year they actually rate Manchester public schools above a B, at about 3.1 right there in terms of meeting the needs of minority students, these are significant differences in perception. We next asked respondents what their primary sources of information about Manchester public schools were and you can see from these slides that clearly word of mouth is a primary source of information. My kids for those who have children in school and my kid's family, friends and neighbors for those who don't have children in school are primary sources of information about Manchester public schools. Also, note from this slide that *The Union Leader* is a primary source of information about Manchester public schools both for those who have children in school and for those who don't have children in school. In fact, it's the number one source of information about Manchester public schools for those individuals who don't have children in school. How satisfied are you with the quality of information you get related to Manchester public schools...most people are satisfied, 60% and 15% of the general population who have children in school are satisfied with the quality of information they get and that pattern is similar with those who don't have children in school. We asked people how welcomed they felt at the schools and those who have children in school and the general population versus those who don't have children in school...you can see that those who actually have children in school almost 50% feel extremely welcome and almost 90% feel either somewhat or extremely welcomed in the schools and that's encouraging. For those who don't have children in school the pattern is a little bit different. A lot of people in this population don't know whether they feel welcomed at the schools or not. This next slide, I think, is telling...what I've done here is broken down that general population data by income and what you can see if you look at that middle slide is that how welcome to do feel at the schools...those who were earning between \$50,000 and \$74,000 as a total household income don't feel particularly welcomed in the schools and that's consistent with the perception data, the ratings of the school. Next we asked respondents whether they were satisfied with the opportunities that the schools provide for academic and involvement and this was asked of people who have children in school. You can see that the vast majority of individuals who have children in school feel satisfied or extremely satisfied for the opportunities for academic involvement. Among the general population we asked what are the most important issues facing the Manchester public schools and this actually comes out to be consistent with the ratings data...you can see that the student to teacher ratio is the number one response as a first response to this question. So, open ended what's your first response, the first thing that comes to mind...28% state that the student/teacher ratio is

one of the most important issues facing Manchester public schools; that pattern is similar among those who don't have children in school and if we do the total mentions slide you see the same pattern and data. Number one mentioned issue is student to teacher ratio; the number two mentioned issue the lack of funding; and that is also the number three mentioned issue over here for those who don't have children in school. We asked individuals whether they had experienced any problems with Manchester public schools in the last two years...22% of the general population who have children in school said yes. We asked how serious this problem was, 64% said it was very serious...this is of the 22% who said they had a problem with the Manchester public schools in the last year...only 9% said that the problem was not that serious. Then we followed up by asking how the problem was dealt with...which school did you have this problem with we asked first and you can see that it's relatively evenly spread across the schools, 36% elementary, 39% middle, and 21% high school...3% said they had a problem with the district. Then we asked how the problem was handled...24% said they're still working on the problem but noticed that nearly 40% said that it's a systemic problem that either has not been resolved satisfactorily or has not been satisfactorily resolved. Switching over to the businesses we asked those in charge of hiring at businesses to evaluate Manchester public school graduates in terms of these basic skills that a graduate may possess coming out of the Manchester public schools. What you'll see here is that the pattern shows in terms of basic academic schools Manchester graduates are rated relatively high at 2.6 almost a B- and in terms of technology skills they get a 2.8...their highest rating among businesses, so the perception on those very basic skills is very high but if you look at personal quality skills, interpersonal skills, thinking and problem solving skills, these more general skills, less specific you see the ratings are lower. We broke down that data by size of business and you'll see a trend downward as the size of the business increases. But, note on this slide that technology skills...this light colored bar right here...second from the end stays consistently high across size of business. So, regardless of size of business Manchester public school graduates technology skills are deemed to be very good. We wanted to address what sort of support there would be for business community involvement in educational issues in the Manchester Public School District so we asked whether the general population would support this and whether businesses would support this and you can see that 56% of the general population would strongly support business community involvement in educational issues. Similarly, in the business community 47% nearly 50% of businesses said that they would strongly urge the business community involvement in educational issues in the Manchester Public School District and only 2% said that they would moderately oppose and no one in the business community said they would strongly oppose. We followed that up by asking what the most effective way for businesses to have a positive impact on Manchester public schools would be and the answers varied but the most popular answer most frequently cited answer was to sponsor job shadowing and internships. Second, to offer direct workplace experiences and third guest speakers. Seven percent said that contributing resources would be the most effective way for the business community to have a positive impact on MPS. What was encouraging in that data was that we followed up with a question of how willing people would be to actively contribute in the

way that they mentioned and nearly 40% of businesses said that they would be very willing to contribute in the way that they suggested and 26% said that they would be moderately willing. Only 9% said that they would be unwilling to contribute in the way that they mentioned. I'm going to get to my last few slides here and these few slides are critical...we've done some advanced statistical analysis on these slides and I want to take a few minutes to describe that. I'm going to describe this slide first...this was asked of the general population...the question was "would you recommend the Manchester public school system to a family considering relocating to the area?" We calculated this would be a key dependent variable, something very important to the school system and to the community as a whole. This is something that you want to have high marks on. You can see that the results here are encouraging...37% said that they would be extremely or very likely to recommend the school system to a family considering relocating to the area and 31% said that they would be moderately or somewhat likely. Now, obviously, this is not a panacea...we have some room for improvement here and what we're going to show in the next couple of slides are the ways in which perceptions can be changed most effectively as determined by the perception data that we've included. This is a busy slide but it's really actually quite informative and gives us some key insights. This is a structural equation model, this is a statistical model of all of the perception data that we've gathered so far...I'm going to orient to this slide a little bit and then describe some key findings in it. What you'll see here, these ovals are called latent variables and these variables are not measured directly. We didn't measure academic evaluation directly, however, if we consider this to be a non-measured variable that is indicated by the variables that we did measure, those appear in a box, we can estimate what this academic evaluation is. So, academic evaluation is indicated by how people rated the academic quality, the appropriateness of the curriculum, the student to teacher ratio and the teachers themselves. The non-academic evaluation included buildings and facilities, the arts and music programs and the sports programs. So, these variables in turn influence variables that we'll call downstream variables. So, everything on the right side of this slide is caused by, this is a causal structure...those variables on the left side of this diagram so you can see the evaluations of the academics and the non-academics at Manchester public schools are influencing the evaluations of the schools themselves; that is the ratings on the elementary, middle and high schools and those evaluations in turn are influencing the overall perception of Manchester public schools which was the key objective of the study. The overall perception of Manchester public schools is indicated by individuals likelihood to recommend the school, the slide that I just talked about, they're overall impression of the schools and whether they feel the schools are headed in the right direction or not. So, what we can do with this model is actually show how changes in perceptions of the curriculum will influence through a causal structure the likelihood that someone will recommend the Manchester public schools to someone relocating to the area...very powerful statistical model and again it's a statistical model so we have a 95% confidence interval around all of these coefficients. What does this slide tell us here. If you look at the magnitude of these values here....point 7 and .34 that tells you the magnitude of the influence over the degree to which each of these variables is influencing the variable that it's pointing into. So, what you see that in terms of

evaluating schools it's the academic evaluation that's having a much larger impact on that evaluation than the non-academic evaluation. In fact, it's nearly twice as strong and the evaluation of schools is having a strong impact on the perception of MPS. In fact, we're able to account for 53% of the variance in the perception of the Manchester public schools. What does that mean, I know it's a lot of statistical lingo...let me put it into actual terms that may be meaningful to more people in the audience. This slide is very similar to the last one, it's the same model, but what I've done is shown how changes in perceptions on these critical variables over here will influence this critical variable over here the likelihood to recommend. So, we know that the student to teacher ratio got a very low rating, a 2.1 in the general population...you can see the mean right there, well that's about a C. If we were to change public perception of the student to teacher ratio from a C to an A that would be a 1.95 change...what would happen to the likelihood to recommend? Well, what would happen is if we changed from a C to an A on the perceptions of student to teacher ratio the likelihood for someone to recommend would change from an average of somewhat to moderately likely to a very to extremely likely and that's a change that you would want to effect, that is a change that you would want in your community and this is showing that this causal structure actually will change those perceptions here. To show the difference in the degree of the academic evaluation versus the non-academic evaluation let's say public perceptions of the arts and music program change from a B- where it is now to an A...what would that do in terms of changing likelihood to recommend? Well, it would change individuals from a mean of somewhat likely to moderately likely to just moderately likely. So, it's a smaller change. You see a relatively lower impact for changes and perceptions down here versus changes and perceptions up here...what does that mean? It means that academic evaluation is really driving the perceptions of Manchester public schools and the likelihood that individuals recommend the public schools to relocating to the area. And, that's my final slide.

Ms. Comstock stated may I just have a couple of closing comments. First of all, Carol and Aaron, thank you so much. Every time I see this presentation I learn a little more. I neglected, Mayor, to mention a group that really deserve so much gratitude. There is an Education Committee at the Chamber of Commerce. The results that you see tonight are the result of a year of work of that committee and members of that committee included Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ludwell, Henry Aliberti and Frank Bass; Dave Scannell's also provided enormous amount of support, of course Mayor Baines himself and Leslie Stewart as Vice-Chair of the School Board and truthfully without this collaborative effort of so many parties representing so many segments of our community we just would not have been able to produce what we were able to present to you tonight. So, our gratitude is really to all of you who made this possible and are as committed to solutions as we are. So, thank you very much. Ron Rioux, President and CEO of St. Mary's Bank is the Chairman of our Chamber Education Committee, so thank you one and all very, very much.

Alderman Gatsas stated, Aaron, you interviewed 315 people some with school children and some without. How many of them were taxpayers?

Mr. Reid replied I can look at the data and I can get that answer for you, I don't know off the top of my head.

Alderman Gatsas asked did you ask that question?

Mr. Reid stated did we ask whether you pay taxes to Manchester, whether you pay local taxes, is that the question? We did not ask that question in the survey.

Alderman Gatsas asked did you ask the question whether they were homeowners or renters?

Mr. Reid replied I can look at the survey and, in fact, the survey is included in the full report. You can see the survey instrument in total.

Alderman Shea stated one thing that set out when reading this report...the first one because of high quality public school system is central to the greater Manchester ability to recruit and keep businesses and to attract educational professionals, what kind of priority should be placed on an inclusion in our educational facilities similar to say something like Boston Latin. In other words, because the business community sends their children to private schools because they can afford private schools once in a while a kid will maybe be lucky enough to get some kind of financial help, they can afford that but there are other people who are in the general population who have very bright students but they can't afford that same kind of quality education. Should this be, in your judgment, a priority within the Manchester School District?

Ms. Keirstead replied I guess my response to that is to say that first I'd be reticent to recommend where you place priority. I can just tell you the data that we were able to collect is only based on perceptions at this point and I think by and large people are satisfied with the fact that the schools really prepare college bound students very well. I think the greater concern is for students who are sort of average, considered to be average students. So, I think people's desire would be for attention to what they see the needs of the average student. Is that helpful?

Alderman Shea replied it helps me in terms of the general population, but it doesn't answer the question in terms of why people who are in the private sector choose the facilities that they do and I assume that the more affluent people are the more prone they would be to direct their child to either The Derryfield, St. Paul's, Phillips Andover or wherever...I'm not sure if Trinity High School would be included in this.

Ms. Keirstead stated clearly the response from that group of people indicated that the reason that they chose private school was for the quality of the academic program, so that would

point to the need for that kind of a program. Whether or not you decide that as a priority would be up to the community here.

Alderman Shea stated when I looked over the report and it was very well done and I appreciate your doing this there was a little bit, in my judgment, inconsistency in terms of how answers were given. For instance, I wouldn't say they were contradictory but there was a certain amount of ambivalence. For instance, how well are the schools serving the needs of various students. In one particular situation teachers were rated the highest but then in the other kinds of situation all segments say on page 6...all segments in the section serving diverse students need equally...in other words, at first they say they're equally served and then they say that there is a certain amount of negativism in terms of the differences in the evaluation processes at all levels that the student population, for instance, are not...most negative perception of school serviced to minority students, evaluation of student preparation, differences in the evaluation processes...these are all skills and duties and responsibilities on the part of the teaching staff. So, on the one hand they say the teachers are the most important but on the other hand the most negative part is the fact that these are not properly being done.

Ms. Keirstead stated interesting question...again, a reminder that this is the study of how people think of the public schools and not necessarily based on detailed facts. I would say that while you can say it's the responsibility of teachers to deliver all of those services it again points to the fact that it is a systemic response in terms of the kinds of curriculum that is offered in the district. Then after that it's the teacher's responsibility to deliver that curriculum.

Mr. Reid stated let me add to that. I think that some of the data that was consistent across the qualitative and quantitative work was that the teachers were rated very high and one of the things that Carol mentioned in her presentation was that the teachers are...the perception of the teachers is that they're providing an education against a lot of odds and so while preparation may be rated low, as you mentioned, it seems as though the public perception is not placing the onus on the teachers. They are just suggesting that the teachers are doing all that they can and are doing a very good job with what they have to work with, but perhaps there are other factors that are influencing their delivery to those different groups.

Mayor Baines stated just a reminder to everyone this is a perception survey...perception does not always equal reality because you have to also look at where people are getting their information or how they're getting their information which also part of the analysis here. So, we've got to be very careful on this, this is a snapshot looking at perceptions people have.

Alderman Lopez stated I just wanted to ask you in comparison of the 108,000 in the City of Manchester utilizing 300 people, is that a comparison to other cities and along with that in

asking somebody a question using perception do you get into a dialogue as to give reality before they give the perception or after?

Mr. Reid asked could you repeat the second part of that question again for me?

Alderman Lopez stated I'm asking if when you ask a question in taking your question is it just a direct question and getting an answer without getting into a dialogue as to what reality is?

Mr. Reid stated let me answer the second part first. We ask questions almost exactly as you saw them tonight, so how welcome do you feel in the schools? That's the direct question that we're asked and what we're trying to ascertain is the feeling, the perception that they have about how welcome they are or what their overall impression is of Manchester public schools. So, it is a perception and how perception translates into reality it's really an issue that the study in and of itself can't address and there will be some gaps but there will also be a lot of consistencies between perception and reality and so the challenge will be to find where we have consistencies between perception and reality and where there are gaps. I had a conversation with Leslie (Stewart) and one of the gaps may be in perceptions of the student to teacher ratio...Leslie and I were talking about this and actually, correct me if I'm wrong on the actual statistics, but the student to teacher ratio in Manchester public schools is actually much lower than the national standard or the national average...you can clarify that for me.

School Committee Member Stewart stated I was talking to you about what our elementary schools student/teacher ratio was and that it was below the state minimum standard for the most part. But, our high schools have some pockets of very large classes and that may be in the perception because that gets more publicity, if you will, and that the elementary classes tend to be a lower student/teacher ratio.

Mr. Reid stated this is a good illustration. You need to find out what factors are actually driving those perceptions and that may be an example of it. To address the first part of your question...a sample of 315 people is a good size sample to generalize to a population. What we mean by a good size sample is the size of your sample indicates the margin of error in your statistics and a margin of error for a sample of 315 is about plus or minus 6%. That means that the percentages you can see generalize to the population plus or minus 6%. You may be familiar with political polling and margin of error percentage for a particular candidate...the same applies here. So, in terms of the general question a sample of 315 people is a very good sample representing the entire Manchester population and since it was a random sample we can say that it does generalize there. Let me say one other thing the statistical model has a margin of error less than plus or minus 5%. So, the statistics are quite precise even with this sample, it's a pretty good size sample.

School Committee Member Ouellette stated hearing the report I can't help but think how actually accurate in terms of talking to people on the street about what the perceptions are like in terms of our strengths...what popped out at me was...a lot of things that popped out at me was the strength that people are taking notice that our Alternative Education Programs in the past two years that the district has really, really worked out to adding new programs; that that information is getting out there because one of the areas of the concern is the dropout rate and that is helping us to address those issues and we also hear a lot about the average student and I think that's a very good point that that needs to be looked at and brought to the forefront...along with high school parents are really felling left out...those are the things that I think...I really thought that they hit the nail right on the head in that area. One thing that also stuck out to me and I'm quite not sure exactly what it means but in the perception of the lack of support from city leaders, could you explain to me exactly what that means?

Ms. Keirstead replied what we heard from people when they talk about the lack of support they described conversations that they might see on Access TV or they might read about it in the paper...the perceptions from those conversations being about...it's not really about quality education for kids but keeping taxes low, they talk about the struggle over budgets and seeing how much energy goes into the budgeting process versus energy going into talking about quality curriculum. So, it was relaying what they're hearing people talking about and what that means.

School Committee Member Ouellette stated another major area of concern is that I Chair the Curriculum & Instruction Committee, I do feel that somewhere in the middle school there is a great perception out there that either we're not doing something right or we're not doing the middle school model exactly correctly and we had a planning session a couple of weeks ago and that very issue came up as to something that we really want to tackle. I think a full blown study probably needs to be done...is the middle school model working, what are we doing in the middle school model, can our middle school model work with a few changes out there. So, I want to thank the Chamber for coming forward and doing this because it does open some eyes that people are really in tune as to what is going on, a lot of perception out there too that people maybe not know what's going on, so this was a great eye opener.

Alderman Porter stated I guess I'd like to ask the question where do we go from here? Statisticians like assumptions...let's assume that all of these perceptions are reality. Is the goal to determine which are valid and which aren't and then the other question...what do you do about it? The other observation I made is that a lot of people had education as a serious issue and I'd just like to bring out...I do know that in my discussions with people in the ward, just conversation, oftentimes education will be there concern but it won't necessarily be the curriculum but rather the cost. So, I think that maybe if we differentiate between the educational concern of curriculum versus education concern about the costs. Where should we go from here, I guess would be the question in your opinion.

Ms. Keirstead stated a couple of things comes to mind that the data points to. One is that there are clear differences in perception about the schools and so that in my mind points to the need for increasing dialogue across various segments in the community. Our sense from looking at the data is that there are some clear divides within the community and people are not engaging across those divides. So, that is something that is relatively easy to address and that's getting people to talk with one another and the Chamber is taking that charge very seriously. I think the other thing is to begin to take seriously the notion that the public schools are the responsibility of the community. Urban environments can't depend solely on the schools to take care of the problems of public education and I think that came across very clearly. Manchester has an array of resources here to draw upon and again I think the Chamber is very interested in trying to help with those connections.

Ms. Comstock stated I think you said it all, Carol. Just to let you know Aldermen we have felt very strongly from the beginning that we did not want to produce a report that would sit on your shelf or mine and so the first step really and I'm very anxious to see what occurs on Thursday night. The first step is to continue the cooperation to work very hard to bring all segments of the community together to have discussion, to share their particular experiences...we were talking about perception when Alderman Lopez was talking about is about belief systems...to talk about their belief systems and their experiences and in partnership with the Superintendent of Schools begin to address the issues in a way that is most appropriate and productive for that particular issue. We don't yet know how those responses will be manifested but we feel very strongly that those decisions have to be made collaboratively...civic leaders such as yourself and your colleagues on the Aldermanic Board, School Board Members, childless, with child, minorities, wealthy, the poor...all segments special needs, business and private sector and public sector have to come together and again as Carol suggested and Aaron too perhaps at this point in time in our journey through the course history the Chamber of Commerce is a perfect agent or catalyst to bring those parties together, to place all the cogs together to roll the wheel.

Alderman Porter stated I'd like to commend both prior Boards of Aldermen and the Board of School Committee because on the tax base particularly because we have funded, I assume you are aware, \$105 million bond issue to bring the schools, the physical plants up to where they should be and I think that the citizens of the City have made a commitment, so have the civic leaders and I just hope that everyone is aware of that and maybe we as a Board of Aldermen and Board of School Committee can do something a little better in kind of advertising...here's your tax money at work whether it's a pound card tucked into the tax bills at tax time where everybody sees something and I think oftentimes when people complain about taxes it okay but when they see the highway crew patching streets or plowing they don't have a problem at all and I think if we can bring it to people that we are...the curriculum is another issue, that is strictly up to the Board of School Committee and

the district. But, I think from the financial point of view the citizens and the civic leaders have made tremendous commitments along with the business people.

Mayor Baines stated that is interesting...Alderman Porter was at the Chamber presentation and after we left he said that's an interesting perception about the schools but then I thought about what he said too that we don't communicate well. But, the other part of it might be due to the frustration of what's going on with the construction too that once things are finished that they'll be a better understanding. But, I think his comment also about communicating about what is being done...that's what you can gather from his theory because if they're getting their source of information from X. Y, Z...my experience and maybe it's different from others that their source of information is not only always accurate and not always objective...people form perceptions around that...that's where we have to do a better job as a Board of Mayor and Aldermen and Board of School Committee communicating directly to the people in the community and I believe we can do a better job.

Ms. Comstock stated I so agree that's so well said and I think too that media has to be a partner. We saw where we gather our information, we heard and understand about our preferences and how information is delivered and the environment in which it's delivered and I think that therein lies many answers for us. So again, obviously, it's very important that media and media methods are also a partner and stakeholder and our progress is moving forward.

Mayor Baines stated my comments weren't necessarily critical of the media theirs is a very small part of communication and we need to broaden the communication because the media has a certain role. Sometimes it has a critical role which is equally important.

Ms. Comstock stated you're actually correct. Sixty-two percent of information is gathered...I refer to it as the soccer field, but yes word of mouth is a high percentage.

Mayor Baines stated absolutely, so we need to go to more soccer fields.

School Committee Member Stewart asked I'm wondering how difficult is it to change perception and also what are the strongest factors involved?

Ms. Keirstead replied going back to Aaron's presentation which I think very effectively showed that if you do address issues that are of most concern to people you do make improvements then that doesn't affect their perceptions. I think equally important in Aaron's data which we didn't really talk about is if you look at the data and you look at the "Don't Know" category there's a lot of room as the Mayor indicated for improvement and getting the word out. I think one of the things that this clearly points to is the need for the system to really think about it can communicate it's message, what that message needs to be about and I think there's a lot of data here that can help craft those message. One of the things that the

Chamber said early on is we don't want to create a marketing campaign that's not based on reality...well, one of the things that we learned is there's a lot you can market here. It's not making stuff up, it's really telling the story about what's really going on in the Manchester schools and not saying everything's perfect but really just communicating very seriously and honestly with the public about what's going on.

School Committee Member Stewart stated if we were in advertising they'd say you'd have to see the message seven times for somebody to remember it. Is there a rule of thumb regarding changing perceptions?

Ms. Keirstead replied there is a lot of research out there about image and perception and I think one of the keys and one of the reasons we did the photo elicitation approach in this is that people describe their experience in Manchester using similar kinds of language and if you can pick up on the language that resonates with people and use those messages over and over again you will, in fact, change public perceptions. The images communicated through the Aldermanic meetings, through *The Union Leader*, through whatever vehicles people are hearing those are the messages that they're resonating with now. If you change the language, if you change the message then you're going to change people's perception. So, that was one of the goals of this research was to uncover some of that language to uncover the things that really meant a lot to people and how that would influence how they would feel.

Ms. Comstock stated may I just add on to that, Carol, and yet at the same time it's very important that we do not allow this to become a marketing plan where we're just modifying messages. We really want to look at issues and be a partner in addressing those issues in conjunction with the school administrators in the public school system.

Mayor Baines stated and a great response to that is the perception of the middle schools that School Committee Member Ouellette stated previously...there's a perception out there that we hear constantly you need to prove it or disprove it about what's happening at the middle school level in terms of expectations of kids and that's certainly a challenge and deserves a lot of attention.

School Committee Member Herbert stated that was a very nice study and it's making me think about a few things that maybe I hadn't thought about before. I'm involved in the building business and I think that while you're asking these questions, as the Mayor indicated I think we were just beginning a project so what was bad was being destroyed before it was rebuilt so I think we were in a pretty bad environment to ask those questions. I think if you did the same thing today it would probably get a significantly different response. But, the other thing that I found interesting was the fact that a good percentage of people...that middle income group...I'd like to find out a little more about that...felt disconnected more than other groups from the School District. We're in the process right

now of doing some long-range planning, we just started and I think there's a perception among the School Board, a general one, that that is a problem and one of the things that we think might help is one of the goals we may eventually adopt is that each child will have a direct connection with some specific activity at the school...we're kind of talking about...not just classes because there is this perception that a good portion of kids go in, kind of do their work and get the heck out of there and we'd like to get more of them involved in finding something no matter how small it might be that would give them a connection to the school outside of the classroom, over and above the classroom experience. I'm very intrigued by that statistical stuff you showed and what we've been talking about.

Ms. Keirstead stated I think that's absolutely accurate to start thinking about some of the strategies that would work to make a difference because one of the things that came out very strongly here for people is a sense of connection whether it's manifested in the notion of student/teacher ratio which may not be factual...what I think is really going on there is people want to feel a sense of connection, so I think those kinds of strategies would in fact help to enhance that.

Alderman DeVries asked has there been any effort by this survey to any prior surveys in the community even if the questions weren't identical maybe to look at some historical trend that has been around for decades or generations.

Ms. Comstock stated the short answer is no. We have just this week started discussion about that and going back to the audit particularly that was a Chamber partnership...I wasn't here then either, but I believe what the City and the private and public sector...the short answer is no but I think it's a good question and I think the more recent project that School Match Audit.

Mayor Baines stated but following up with the School Match, you have this survey, you also have the surveys that are done through the accreditation process at all the secondary schools that measure many of the same things that you measured in this survey so that would be a very interesting analysis that is available.

Ms. Comstock stated I bring that to the floor on Thursday night (Community Solutions) and perhaps a task team could help read through that or a group of interns, but I think it's a great question. Like I said we just started talking about it today or yesterday, so perfect time, perfect question.

Mayor Baines stated I would like to close the meeting by commending the Chamber for what I believe is an extraordinary effort and I want to commend the quality of the product. I've been around long enough in education and seen a lot of reports and surveys and analysis and I think this is some of the highest quality that I have seen in my career, so I want to commend you for that and it really gives the community a basis in which to move forward.

I'm very delighted that the community perceives that we are moving in the right direction and I think that's because the Boards of Aldermen and School Board have worked cooperatively to advance the School District and now we have some data to help us improve even further. In closing I would like to invite members of the public to the community forum on education December 2 from 6:30 to 9:00 PM at the McLaughlin Middle School. I regret that I will not be able to attend it because I'll be attending a U.S. Department of Education seminar on high school reform which is certainly part of what we're talking about.

This being a special meeting of the Boards, no further business was presented and on motion of Alderman Smith, duly seconded by School Committee Member Gelinas, the meeting was adjourned.

A True Record. Attest.

City Clerk